Preparing You for a Future of Meaningful Work

This tool is intended to assist you in effectively managing your career exploration, planning, and decision making. In order to prepare for success after graduation, it is essential to take initiative, be intentional, and have goals in mind. Through exploration and “testing out” ideas of interest, your plan may shift or change – that’s completely natural! Stay flexible, and take advantage of the rich resources and support persons who are ready to walk alongside you on your path to purposeful work.

Assess

Assess, articulate and develop your strengths, interests and values. Begin to explore options that are congruent with your awareness of self.

Engage

Purposefully engage in opportunities and with resources that will set you on the path to personal and professional development. Target opportunities where you can apply and further develop your skill sets, grow your experience base, and explore areas of interest.

Experience

Enhance critical professional competencies in order to successfully connect your professional goals with real world opportunities. Take your experience to the next level by participating in meaningful opportunities that will differentiate you from the rest.

Transition

Synthesize your collective experiences from your academics, internships and other experiential learning, service, leadership, and co-curricular involvement. Begin to articulate a plan and take action to translate your skills and experiences into meaningful post-graduate opportunities.
In my work for a non-profit agency, I write newsletters, create print advertisements, update website content, and help maintain communication between our office and clients, donors, and community members. Through my English training at Messiah College, I learned the practical aspects of writing through courses like Magazine Writing, but I also learned the power of language as an art form through literature and creative writing courses. All of this taught me to communicate concisely and effectively not only through an essay or poem, but through any use of language from taglines and flyers to grant proposals and sixteen-page annual reports. To major in English is to major in the power of words.

- Brittny (Lodge) Mountz ’09
Project Assistant and Grant Writer,
Adult Care of Chester County, Exton, PA

The English degree I received at Messiah College was perfect preparation for everything that I have done so far in my life: having a good handle on written communication was valuable in my first job out of school as a store support representative for a major franchise; a highly developed sense of problem-solving and analytical skills were needed when I started a business in England; and the writing disciplines I learned have more recently combined with my passion for the written word as I moved over into full-time freelance writing.

- Shawn Smucker ’99
Freelance Writer
Paradise, PA

My education in the English Department at Messiah College helped me to develop and sharpen the communication skills that I use daily as I correspond with clients, coworkers, and the public. Furthermore, I continuously draw on the critical thinking and analytical skills cultivated in my study of literature and literary theory. But by far the most important influence that has affected my vocational development is the example of my professors, whose lives model the kind of passion, commitment, and integrity that flow from discovering one’s unique giftedness and answering God’s call to use these gifts in service to others.

- Rachel Petersen ’05
Community Living Manager, Paxton Ministries
Harrisburg, PA

As a Literature Emphasis major, I was exposed to great works of literature that helped shape my own compositional abilities, as well as many opportunities to write, edit, and revise my academic papers. Since graduating in 2004, I have had more than 350 essays and articles published in national and regional magazines, and my first book, They Were Still Born: Personal Stories about Stillbirth, was published in 2010.

-Janel Atlas ‘04
Freelance Writer
Newark, DE

So much of being a good theologian and interpreter of the Bible is being a good reader. All the concepts of literary theory and literary criticism transfer to my studies at seminary. There is some new terminology as ideas get translated across disciplines, but the concepts have been the same. It has been a good feeling to realize so many of these key interpretative tools are ones already in my scholarly toolbox. Plus, studying at Messiah College with its emphasis on Christian engagement with broader culture has helped to combat the narrow vision that plagues a number of my peers at seminary who have spent all their lives in insular Christian communities and institutions.

-Matthew Hahn ’06
Working on a Masters of Divinity
Gordon-Conwell Seminary

Whenever I think of what I took away from my time at Messiah, I think first about how the English major taught me to think critically. Regardless of whether we were looking at student writing or classic literature, my classmates and I were encouraged to read texts closely, to interpret carefully, and to communicate our thoughts in class and in writing as clearly as possible. Those skills have served me well in my career -- particularly in my current position working for the human rights organization International Justice Mission. Every day, I’m writing grant proposals and reports that need to clearly capture the desperate needs of vulnerable populations in the world in a way that encourages our supporters to continue partnering with us through prayer and financial support.

- Emily Rainville ’04
Reporting and Research Coordinator, Donor Relations
International Justice Mission, Washington DC
Assess

Who am I & where am I going?

There are several options available to assist you in the process of assessing and developing your strengths, interests and values for careers related to a degree in English. Identify resources from the list below to begin building this important foundation to decision making.

What tools are available?

- **Self-assessment inventories** are available through the Career Center to help you begin narrowing down your interests, strengths, and values.
- Begin to construct an **electronic portfolio** where you can begin to store artifacts, including papers, projects, research, and other accomplishments from your classroom work and out-of-class activities.

How can I find relevant opportunities?

- Visit the “**Explore Career Options**” section on the Career Center’s website. Check out the section, “**What Can I do with a Major in English?**”
- Explore options for **involvement outside of the classroom** through offices and organizations such as Student Involvement & Leadership Programs, the **Agapé Center** for Service & Learning, the **EpiCenter** for Off-Campus Study, **The Writing Center**, **The Swinging Bridge**, **The Minnemingo Review**, Residence Life and much more.
- Read the English Department’s **monthly newsletter** for opportunities both on and off campus.
- **Attend readings** of published authors on campus and ask them about their career paths.

What resources should I be accessing?

- Visit the **Career Center** early, and start constructing a **customized career and professional development plan**.
- **Get to know your advisor and professors** within the English Department. Take advantage of office hours and department activities.
- Become familiar with the resources available through the **English Department’s website**. [www.messiah.edu/departments/english/](http://www.messiah.edu/departments/english/)
- Create a first draft of your **résumé**; what gaps exist? Use this as a guide to start constructing an action plan that includes relevant, sought-after experience.
- Become familiar with the “**transferable skills**” afforded by a liberal arts education. These skills are very marketable to employers and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them.

Reflection Q’s

- How would I describe my skills, interests, and values?
- Considering past and present experiences, what energizes me most? Be specific!
- How are these aspects of myself shaping my decisions about a major and potential career path?
- What options for involvement outside the classroom might allow me to gain experience while further developing my transferable skill sets?
Explore & Engage

How do I choose?

Don’t just become involved. **Intentionally** choose activities that will allow you to grow personally and professionally. Target opportunities and experiences where you can apply and develop transferable skill sets gained as an English major while exploring potential areas of interest. Consider the following options to stay on track.

Who can help?

- Meet with a **Career Center** professional to discuss where you’re at and any adjustments that should be made to your customized career and professional development plan. Brainstorm ideas for complementing your classroom learning with relevant experience to start filling the gaps in your résumé.
- Take the initiative to **build relationships** with your academic advisor, faculty members, RD, and others on campus. Discuss and gain ideas about potential career interests and plans to gain experience. Invest in faculty members with whom you share specific interests/passions. Consider seeking a mentor.

How do I choose from so many options?

- Strategically choose co-curricular activities that will allow you to **gain experience** and further develop your skills. **Employers and grad schools value quality over quantity**, so invest in meaningful opportunities. Seek feedback from your supporters noted above.
- Stop by the **Internship Center** to discuss possible credit-bearing experiences and to learn about sample internships other English majors have pursued.
- Take advantage of a **cross-cultural course** or study abroad experience to make yourself more intriguing to an employer.
- Other options for involvement may include: fellowships, research opportunities, work study options, student clubs and campus organizations, volunteering or service learning, a work study position, and summer or part-time work.
- Practice **articulating** the **transferable skills** you are developing.

What can I do to test out my career interests?

- Consider opportunities such as writing for **The Minnemingo Review** or **The Swinging Bridge**, or applying for a position with **The Writing Center**.
- Conduct an **information interview** or initiate a **job shadowing** experience with a professional in your field of interest.
- **Research** career fields of interest to you. What is the nature of the work and work environment? What skills and experiences are highly desirable? What are some of the behind-the-scenes tasks?
- Consider **connecting with a Messiah alum** through the online alumni directory, **FalconNet**. Consult with the Career Center about how to do this.
- **Begin thinking of how you will spend your summers**. What experiences, paid or volunteer, will help you build on your experience and continue to develop marketable skill sets?

Reflection Q’s

- **What experiences might be valued to a prospective employer or grad school?**
- **How can I apply what I’m learning in the classroom while developing meaningful experience?**
- **Am I focusing on quality rather than quantity?**
Experience

How can I differentiate myself?

It’s time to take your experience to the next level! Increase your marketability and uniqueness through investing in your experience base. Consider the options below as you develop and enhance your “brand.” Think about how your English background will prepare you for making unique contributions to your field of interest.

What constitutes “relevant experience?”

- Every professional field is unique. Do research and talk with professionals who share your interests to know what is valued in your targeted field.
- Virtually all employers are looking for candidates with relevant experience. This may be gained through research experience, an internship (visit the Internship Center), international experience, or volunteer positions. Talk with your advisor about how this fits into your schedule.
- If you haven’t already, consider opportunities such as writing for The Minnemingo Review or The Swinging Bridge, or applying for a position with The Writing Center.
- If you’re considering a career in writing or editing, seek opportunities to have your work published.
- Try to get some of your more substantial, “A” quality papers published in National Journals - Oswald Review or Sigma Tau Delta journals (www/english.org).
- Think creatively about how your experiences, English major, and the skills you’re demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field. How are you conveying this on your résumé?

What professional competencies are important?

- Learn how to effectively market your qualifications through your résumé and cover letter. Stop by the Career Center during drop-in hours or schedule an appointment to receive personalized feedback.
- Strengthen your Interviewing skills by scheduling a mock interview in the Career Center.
- Practice your Networking skills with faculty, alumni, and at Career Center events.
- Build a professional web presence through vehicles such as social networking sites (ex. LinkedIn, Twitter) and e-portfolios. Document your experiences in your electronic portfolio as a way of showcasing your skills and accomplishments.

What tools and resources will help me to get connected professionally?

- Attend job and graduate school fairs and other career-related events throughout the year. Start early; remember, you don’t have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend!
- Connect with professional associations and conferences in your field, such as Sigma Tau Delta. Ask faculty members for ideas of other associations in your area of interest.
- Develop “Networking cards” with basic contact info and a summary of your goals and qualifications. Have these available as you meet new contacts who may serve as critical resources in the future.
- Stay on top of current events, trends, and hot topics in your field through journals, magazines, and the news.
- Save your best papers with professors’ comments on them, to hand back to them so that they have specifics when writing recommendation letters.

Reflection Q’s

- What specific experiences are highly desirable in my targeted field?
- Have I “tested out” my area of interest to know it’s a good fit?
- How am I practicing the skills that will be marketable to my target?
- What will set me apart from the average candidate in my chosen field?
- Have I considered stepping into a leadership role?
Am I ready?

Transitioning to post-graduate life, whether that is graduate school, employment, a gap year, or full-time service, includes many aspects. Keep in mind that career development is a lifetime process. That said, consider it your “first destination.” As a steward of your strengths, consider carefully what you have to contribute to your next step.

What are my transition goals?

- Research and clarify your top occupational or graduate school choices which are congruent with your skills and interests.
- Discuss your goals and ideas with and receive feedback from your faculty and the Career Center (stop by to schedule an appointment).
- Stay active in the process by engaging your network of personal and professional contacts. Communicate your goals and ideas about what might be next for you. Reach out to additional contacts through the alumni directory, FalconNet, and your social networks such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Consult the Career Center for additional tips!
- Stay on track for accomplishing your goals by devising strategies and timelines for making them happen. Consider doing it with a friend and holding one another accountable.

What do I have to offer?

- Reflect on the totality of your experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you have to offer a prospective employer or graduate school? In what practical ways have you demonstrated these strengths? Write them down! This will be the basis of your personal marketing campaign.
- Learn about the breadth of ways Messiah alumni have applied their English degrees to professional contexts through FalconNet, the alumni network.
- Refine and tailor your application or admissions materials, including your résumé, cover letter, essays, and interview responses to include specific examples and stories from your experience.
- Secure employment or graduate school references from those who can speak to your proven strengths and potential. Don’t ask for recommendations at the last minute. Plan ahead and give adequate time (approximately 3-4 weeks).
- If you haven’t already, consider building a professional portfolio (i.e., yola.com). This should incorporate a bit about you, your résumé, transferable skills and experiences, and, most important of all, writing samples.

Where can I find opportunities?

- Use an eclectic mix of resources. View job opportunities posted exclusively to Messiah students through FalconJobs.
- Participate in career events related to important transitional topics.
- Attend job and graduate school fairs locally and in your geographic area of interest.
- Consult job search and graduate school resources on the Career Center website.
- Remember to follow up, say “thank you,” and track progress.
- Consider checking out the Professional Writing Program at Carnegie Mellon University, which has recognized the quality of Messiah English majors.

Reflection Q’s

- What are my top strengths I have to offer an employer or graduate school?
- Does my résumé accurately reflect my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target audience?